

Fighting for Iraq's IED Children

Author: Col. Kelly Faucette, M.D.

Source: The Family Security Foundation, Inc.

Date: June 12, 2006

Even with all the news coverage and analysis of the war in Iraq, nothing can compare to the personal insights of someone who has lived and worked in those conditions. In this poignant and heartfelt story, Col. Kelly Faucette, a physician with the 47th Combat Support Hospital in Mosul, gives us a glimpse into life on the other battlefield, where patients and physicians fight every day to overcome the grievous and indiscriminate assaults of Iraq's insurgents. This is definitely a tale you don't want to miss.

Fighting for Iraq's IED Children

By Col. Kelly Faucette, M.D.

It is 18 minutes after midnight and I cannot sleep again. Some nights are like that. Noise from outside is keeping me awake. My mind is racing with thoughts of the day. Earlier I had walked through the Intensive Care Unit of the 47th Combat Support Hospital, Mosul, Iraq where I work.

A new patient has arrived, lying with his chest exposed and his vital signs electronically monitored. He is ill and we are taking care of him, but he is different than most of our patients. He lies in bed with a bandana covering his eyes, not a bandage. At the foot of the bed are two young American soldiers with weapons in hand. They look at me as I look at our patient, a "bad guy" for sure, as our Iraqi interpreter calls them. He is an insurgent.

My blood pressure rises a bit.

"What did he do?" I ask.

The answer: "He made IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices, bombs which are hidden to explode on the unsuspecting]."

This man is a terrorist, an evil, mean man who plots to kill our folks, other Iraqis, even innocent young children.

My blood pressure rises even more.

Something inside me wants to walk up to this guy, blindfolded or not, and just clobber him. Perhaps I will remove the bandana, so he can see it coming. People certainly do not see the IEDs coming before they explode, destroying life; injuring arms, legs, and bodies.

I look down at this insurgent, an elderly, overweight man. I wonder how we can love our enemies, and how we can pray for those who spitefully use us. I have lived a life with no real enemies. Here is a man who would take my life if he could. Hate and anger raged in me for a time. Other soldiers who see these men without the bandanas tell me that there is often no light in their eyes, no hope, no goodness that you can see. They are filled with a vile fluid, which cannot be easily drained. They are cold and given the chance, would do us harm.

As I walk through the Emergency Department (ED), there are often young American soldiers lying there, injured and receiving care. Twice this week I asked what happened and the answer was the same; an IED had hit their vehicles. No one was hurt badly - not this time - but there

were injuries and the vehicles were badly damaged. How often this happens when I do not walk by, I do not know. I do not work in the ED often.

From the ICU, I walk onto the ward. The staff is glad to see me. One of the children who arrived during a mass casualty a couple of weeks ago is having new problems. A mass casualty is when many patients are injured at once and are brought to the hospital at the same time. On that occasion two weeks ago, an insurgent drove his truck into a marketplace advertising discounted food to the local folks. The children were playing and families gathered and then the truck exploded, killing about 30 people and injuring over 70. Twenty-five of the more seriously wounded were brought to our hospital. Twelve of them were young children. I still remember the bleeding, broken bones, head injuries and a little girl with her intestines covered by a plastic bag.

I have been taking care of this little girl for almost two weeks. The explosion partially eviscerated her, but the medics covered the exposed bowel with a plastic bag and our skilled surgeons sewed her back together. She smiles and waves at me at me now. She was excited to get crayons, a note pad and a candy bar earlier today. These items were sent freely for the giving by good Americans wanting to help.

The staff tells me she is having problems. Perhaps we should have suspected them earlier. The day before, she was not herself; she was not eating as well, and seemed to be uncomfortable. We did a CT scan that showed fluid below her wound; it didn't look particularly worrisome. She did not have a fever and her vital signs were normal. Now her abdominal wound, where her intestines had once been blown out of her body by this truck borne IED set off in the marketplace, is draining pus. The infection is from the dirty bomb fragments that entered her body. Now the infected fluid from her abdominal abscess is pouring through the stitches in her skin. The draining pus scares her and she is crying. It hurts as the nurses work on her, and she cries more. I want to cry too.

My little girl had already had multiple surgeries. The surgeons took her back several times to clean out the wound and again to close the open hole. She had been doing well, but now thick white pus drains across her belly and onto the bed. The nurses are cleaning it up. We send a culture and a gram stain, hoping to identify this new enemy and provide the proper antibiotics to help her heal. This wound needs to drain. Incision and drainage are indicated. Her surgeon is called.

She will get better but it will be take more time. Her wounds will need to be cleaned and drained again. As time goes on perhaps the vileness and anger that we find in our enemies and ourselves will also drain away. This country needs more time to heal. I sometimes eat lunch with some Iraqis who work with us and listen to incredible stories of their struggles. They are trying to help with the healing. The infected need to be found; infected men like this insurgent laying in our ICU. They need to be drained from the society so that the healing can continue. When this man recovers from the illness that brought him to our ICU, he will go to jail. That is where we keep the infected here, those infected with evil and hate. One of our doctors goes there every day to make sure they are healthy.

Perhaps this writing allows me to drain a bit as well. Perhaps I need to try to see this man as someone who is infected by the society in which he grew up, infected by the lies with which he was raised about life and about us, "the infidels," as he would call us. Infidels are those who are not of his faith, not of his country. The insurgents are taught the strictness of the law, but not taught mercy and compassion. They are taught that the worth of a man is nothing, but we know that the worth of man is great in the sight of God. All people have worth. I will try to forgive. I do not understand him, the man lying in the bed with the bandanna over his eyes; I

don't think that I can. Perhaps he cannot understand either, cannot understand why we take care of his illness and do not return the hate and anger which he brings to us and makes us feel.

The rotors of a helicopter outside my living quarters shake the walls and roar gently. Things are happening out there in the middle of the night, as they do every day and night. I have talked to young soldiers whose job is to look for bombs, at least for now. Sometimes the bomb goes off and they are injured and brought into our ED. We are finding the bombs, the IEDs, lots of them, but not all of them. We are finding the men who make these IEDs and there will be fewer bombs, and lives will be saved.

May the Lord bless those brave young men and women who put their lives on the line to stop the explosions and bring in the terrorists, the insurgents; "the bad men." This is my prayer tonight as I head back to bed to try to sleep, while the blades turn and the soldiers work.

--- Col. Kelly Faucette M.D. is a pediatrician and staff physician with the 47th Combat Support Hospital in Mosul, Iraq. He has been chief of the Department of Pediatrics at Madigan Army Medical Center, Fort Lewis, Washington for four years. Having deployed many of the physicians from his department, he decided it was his turn, and did so rather than retire from the Army this summer.

Dr. Faucette is a Pediatric Hematologist/Oncologist and is a graduate of both Brigham Young University and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. He has four grown children and one grandchild and lives with his wife of 27 years in Puyallup, Washington.

<http://www.familysecuritymatters.org/index.php?id=129327>